## COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

# 1st class program for 3rd class mail

There's only one catch to the newest mass mailing software from PostalSoft Inc.: You have to get it up and running.

In last week's column, I discussed how this La Cross, Wis., company's programs can print and sort bulk mailing labels to meet the U.S. Postal Service's complex and picky specifications. Most businesses are willing to contend with these strict requirements because third class mailings cost dramatically less than first class mailings.

PostWare Jr. is designed to help with third class mailings. But does it deliver? To test the program, I used it to prepare the monthly mailings to several thousand subscribers of my Executive Computing Newsletter.

Overall, the program did what it said it would do. It rid me of mail-sorting headaches by printing special codes on each address label, and proved to be very efficient once I got it working.

But that's the hitch.

You can't simply take PostWare Jr. out of the box and expect to use it. It takes a while to figure out how to use the program. Here are some of the problems and delays I encountered:

✔ While it's supposed to be able to read the name and address information from many data bases directly, I was unable to get it working with Power-Base, one of the most popular data base programs. To get PostWare Jr. to accept my data, I had to create a standard ASCII-formatted file with PowerBase, which it was then able to read.

✔ Even when the program does accept data directly from a data base program, as it did when I tested dBASE III, it must take all or nothing. You cannot pick which records in the file you want. Thus, if you have expired subscribers in your data base, these can't be eliminated. You have to first use the data base to select the active records, create a second file, and then use PostWare Jr. with the second file only.

✔ The rest of the setup was also complicated and time-consuming. I spent at least two hours defining my printer, entering label specifications and detailing the mailing before I could start printing.

✔ The program insists on printing a sticker code on every single label. Since the post office only requires a sticker on the top envelope of each bundle, this repetitive coding seems superfluous.

On the other hand, an unexpected benefit was the way the program automatically shifted lines up to fill in blank lines on printed labels. If one of my records didn't have a company's name, which normally takes up the second printed line, the program shifted the bottom lines up to fill in the unsightly gap.

Despite the long initial set up, I remain impressed with PostWare Jr. The program not only printed all the address labels in correct order, but prepared all of the bag labels and printed a management report with all the information needed for the Post Office paperwork.

*The bottom line:* Once you set it up, learn how to use it and get used to its eccentricities, PostWare Jr. could save you a great deal of time from then on. You're likely to earn back it's $69 cost in short order.

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